

GENDER DISPARITY IN INTERNET ACCESS AND USAGE IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *Statistics available show a significant increase in global internet use. In 2007 internet use was only 20.6% but it gradually increased to 47.1% in 2016. despite this positive development, studies have shown that there are disparities in internet usage between countries and within countries. According to statistics (2018) only 18.6% of the female population in Africa had online access. Nigeria has been ranked the first in Africa and the eighth in the world in terms of internet usage. Therefore, the main objective of the study was to find out the level of internet access and use among the respondents based on gender, with kano municipal as a case study. The survey research method was used and stratified sampling was applied to select 200 male and 200 female respondents. Results show that there is gender disparity as more men access and use the internet more than women. Reasons identified for this phenomenon include inadequate education, inadequate internet skills, cost of using the internet, inadequate time due to domestic roles and attitudes of man. The paper also argues that gender disparity has implications for development in Nigeria as it leads to the gender digital divide. It also denies a lot of women many benefits of using the internet in terms of economic, social, political, educational and cultural growth. Women have missed out on a lot of opportunities like a public discussion about topical issues, networking, online long-distance education, e-commerce, participation in development issues and information on various issues.*

Keywords: *Internet; Gender; Disparity; Nigeria; National Development*

Introduction

The Internet is now a global phenomenon with many benefits. It can be accessed for information on health, nutrition, business, politics and government, education, and other

topics and this paves the way for economic, social, political and cultural growth. For an individual to develop and also participate in societal development it is imperative to be well informed. Studies have shown that one of the ways of getting information is through the internet. According to Livingston (2010) the Internet is associated with rapid social, political, economic and cultural changes as it has become widely used and significantly embedded in almost every dimension of society. In addition, men and women face a lot of challenges and the Internet contains information on solutions to most of these problems. Therefore, it is important to have access and use the internet for personal and societal development and to also solve challenges.

Nigeria has been ranked the first in Africa and the 8th in the world in terms of internet usage. However, access and usage of the internet is not equal for the citizens of Nigeria. This means that despite the growth in Internet access and its benefits, it widens inequalities as some categories of individuals are excluded from this development. The digital divide could be as a result of age, class, educational level, gender and geographical location. According to Wong et al. quoted in Gillwald and Mothobi (2017) of all these factors, gender issues have gained the uppermost attention of researchers. Available statistics show that in most countries of the world, especially developing countries, majority of those who accessed and used the internet are men. For example, an International Telecommunications Union (ITU) report indicates that there are 200million fewer women online than men and that this figure could rise to 350 million by 2018.

According to World Bank (2018), internet usage worldwide in 2017 by gender and region indicate that only 18.6 percent of the female population in Africa had access to the internet. In the Americas, 66.7 of women had access to the internet. In Europe, the figure was 76.3 percent, in the Arab states the figure was 39.4% and in Asia pacific, only 39.7% of female population had access to the internet. Ya'u and Aliyu (2017) reported that research by Phew in 2015 puts the percentage of Internet users in Nigeria at 39% with male users at 48% and female users at only 29%.

These statistics show that in most countries, especially developing countries, the use of internet is lower among women than men. Wijaya and Polina (2014) have argued that one's gender is always relevant where access, use, content and impact of the internet are concerned. By implication gender is a strong determinant in the internet access discourse.

Further, studies have also shown that even among women, internet access and usage is not equal. There are indications that internet access and use is higher among educated, younger, urban and economically independent women.

It is important to close the gender gap because of the implication on development. As argued by Collado (2014) the use of these technologies has become increasingly critical to educational and economic success. The internet affords women the opportunity to network, form connections and platforms on issues concerning them, economic advancement, share experiences on health and nutrition, participate in public discussion and voice their opinion. Therefore, the inability of many women to access and use the internet robs them of these benefits and opportunities. In addition, these women cannot contribute to any meaningful societal development since they do not have the skills, knowledge and necessary information

as a result of lack of access and use of the Internet. Consequently, the society lags behind in terms of development.

Given this general background, the study aimed to determine gender disparity in access and usage of the internet among the residents of Kano Municipal in Nigeria. The objectives of the study are: -

1. To find out the characteristics of females and males who access and use the internet
2. To highlight the frequency of use among the respondents
3. To determine what the respondents use the internet for
4. To highlight the impediments to access and use of internet among respondents

A Brief on Kano Municipal

Kano is the state capital of Kano state in North West of Nigeria. It is the largest commercial state in Nigeria and according to 2006 population census (which is the latest census), it has 9.4 million people. All categories of products both manufactured and semi-processed are marketed in Kano. The inhabitants largely engage in agriculture. Kano is also an industrial state as there are many small-scale industries. There are forty-four Local Governments in the state. The predominant religion is Islam and Hausa are the main language spoken. Christians and other ethnic tribes are also found in the state though they form small part of the population. Hausa women engage in income generating activities within the confines of their homes and the children or wards of the women usually hawk the products on the streets. A few educated women earn a living by working in the public sector and some uneducated one's work in companies and industries at the lower cadre. Kano municipal is a Local Government Area within Kano urban area in Kano state and it has a population of three hundred and sixty-five thousand, five hundred and twenty-five (365,525) people. It has an area of 17km² and 13 wards. Source: Kano Municipal Local Government Office.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Uses and Gratifications theory to explain access and use of the Internet among the respondents. The theory is concerned about what people do with the media and not what the media do to people. McQuail (2010) and Little John and Foss (2008) explain that the theory implies that the audience is active and purposely seek for media messages to satisfy some identified needs. The theory is concerned with media consumption among the audience. In addition, it is concerned with who uses which content from which medium and under what conditions and for what reason(s). This implies that the audience is active and influential in the communication process. The theory also recognizes that factors like age, education, interests, experiences, needs and background influence how and why we use the media as an audience. According to Asemah (2017) as traditional mass media and new media continue to provide people with a wide range of media platforms and contents, it is considered one of the most appropriate perspectives for investigating why audiences choose to be exposed to different media channels. Therefore, the theory is relevant in explaining what men and women use the Internet for and the benefits derived in using the Internet.

Literature Review

Moemeka (1998) defines development as the set of activities and actions of diverse actors, individuals, organizations, groups, governments which taken together, leads to progress and better improved life amongst people of varying geographical locations in the developing countries. This definition implies that both men and women are expected to contribute to the growth and positive change of the society through their actions and activities. For people to be able to act and carry out activities for development purpose, information is necessary.

Development is information based. Individuals require adequate and necessary information to be able to contribute to meaningful development of the society. The Internet has been identified as a viable source of information on development issues. However, access and usage of Internet for individual and societal growth is not equal for all. According to Chye et al (2012) the Internet is not yet an equal playing field for both genders. Women are still about 50% less likely to be connected to the Internet than men. Similarly, Bhuva (2018) also reports that as India is estimated to reach half a billion Internet users by June 2018, Internet use is still more among men than women. Hafkin and Huyer (2007) also provide that in Africa, women are 50% less likely to use the Internet than men. These show that in terms of gender, more men access and use the Internet than women. Therefore, Primo (2003) laments that few African women have used the Internet for business development, educational purposes or for information relating to the quality of life of either themselves or their families (such as health and nutrition information).

The importance of access and usage of the Internet to development cannot be overemphasized. Generally, a lot of information on development issues is available on the Internet. There is information on politics, culture, social life, economic activities empowerment, health etc. There are also issues which are peculiar to women and information on these issues is also available on the net. These issues range from domestic violence, maternal mortality, human trafficking, to rape, child abuse, discrimination, gender inequality, and women related health challenges. These are development issues and it is important for women to prevent or overcome these challenges through access and use of information on the Internet. In the words of Hafkin and Huyer (2007) Internet access and usage can have a profound impact on women's lives and it can also deliver significant benefits to the wider economy and society. Collado (2014) also asserts that Internet skills are key for women in order to get better jobs, as well as for self-employment and entrepreneurship. According to Gillwald and Mothobi (2017) access to the Internet is essential to women's empowerment across the continent and it is key to overcome barriers such as poverty, illiteracy and discrimination. Similarly, Ya'u and Aliyu (2017) corroborate that the keys to overcoming the marginalization of women are education, political participation and economic empowerment, all of which are possible through the effective use of the Internet. Hence these analyses show that for women to develop and be able to contribute to meaningful development of the society, it is imperative to have access and use the information available on the Internet.

Development also requires adequate knowledge about issues in the society including knowledge about how to acquire skills which are also readily available on the Internet. The acquisition and use of skills by individuals through the Internet pave the way for development. Therefore, Deen-Swarray, Gillwald, Morrel and Khan (2012) argue that a knowledge society cannot be built successfully without harnessing the capabilities and skills

of all its members. This implies that knowledge is a prerequisite for development as individuals are expected to apply their skills in the development process; however, many women cannot participate in development because they do not have adequate access and usage of the Internet to acquire skills and build their capacities. Societal development requires the participation of members of that society but when as a result of lack of access and usage of the Internet some individuals (many women) are denied this opportunity, development will be slow.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research method in order to achieve its objectives. To ensure representation, the stratified sampling was used in selecting the sample. In addition to gender, factors like age, economic status and educational level were taken into consideration. Therefore, a sample of two hundred males and two hundred females was drawn, using simple random sampling, from the study population, which was Kano Municipal. Four hundred copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents and all the copies of the questionnaire were retrieved showing a hundred percent response rate. With the help of research assistants, the copies of the questionnaire were administered face to face. The exercise was carried out on the 10th and 11th of February 2018. These two days were deliberately chosen to ensure the participation of civil servants since they do not go to work on weekends. Most of the questionnaires were collected in those two days and the rest were collected a few days later by the researcher and the assistants.

The data gathered showed that 45.3% of the respondents (males and females) were between ages 18-30, 32.2% were between the age of 31 to 45, 12.5% were between the age of 45 to 55. Thirty percent of the respondents had only basic education (majority are females), 45.3% were educated up to secondary school, while only 24.7% were educated up to tertiary level, majority of whom are men. About 80% of the male respondents have a source of income and on the other hand only 45.5% of the female respondents have a source of income.

Table 1: Responses on Access and Usage of The Internet

Access and Usage	Frequency		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yes	178	149	89	74.5
No	22	51	119	25.5

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 1 above shows that majority of the male respondents (89%) had access to the internet while only 74.5% of female respondents agreed to that effect.

Table 2: Frequency of Internet Usage Among Respondents

Frequency of use	Frequency		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Daily	80	40	45	27
Few times in a week	78	60	44	40
Once in a while	20	49	11	33
Daily	80	40	45	27

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 2 above shows that 45% of the male respondents and 27% of the female respondents use the internet daily. Forty four percent and 40% of male and female respondents respectively use the internet few times in a week. Thirty three percent of female respondents and 11% of the male respondents use the internet once in a while. Note that only 178 and 149 males and females respectively accessed and used the internet as shown in the previous table.

Table 3: Reasons for Using the Internet Among Respondents

Reasons	Frequency		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Professional	65	35	37	23
Social networking	45	120	25	81
General information	90	135	45	91
Academic /Research	40	20	22	11

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 3 shows the reasons respondents access and use the internet. Thirty seven percent of males and 23% females use the internet for professional reasons. Eighty one percent of males and 25% of females use the internet for social networking. Ninety one percent of females and 45% of males accessed and used the internet for general information on various issues. Eleven percent of females used the internet for academic/research purposes while 22% of males agreed to that effect.

Table 4: Impediments to Access and Use of The Internet Among Respondents

Impediments to Access and use	Frequency		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Cost	60	90	34	61
Inadequate skills	25	55	14	37
Inadequate time	40	130	22	87
Male attitude	50	70	28	47

Source: Field Survey, 2018

Table 4 above shows the factors that impede the respondents from accessing and using the internet. Majority of the female respondents (87%) said inadequate time affects their access and use of the internet while 22% of males agreed to that affect. Sixty one percent of the female respondents said the cost of accessing the internet affects their use of the internet while 34% of males agreed to that affect. Inadequate skills account for 37% of females and 14% of males.

Discussion

The results of the study show that more males access and use the internet than females. This is shown in table 1 where 89% of male respondents agreed to have access and use the Internet. Most studies on gender and internet access and usage show that there is disparity between men and women. For example, studies by Anunobi and Mbagwu (2009); Wajiya and Polina (2014); and Ya'u and Aliyu (2017) also show similar results, that is more males' access and use the Internet than females. It was also found that women spend less time online

than men as shown in table 2. This is as a result of the factors that impeded their access and use of the internet. In addition, women spend less time on the Internet as a result of gender roles. They perform household chores like cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the family and the performance of these roles makes women not to have enough time to spend online.

Looking at the characteristics of the respondents, the results show that Internet access and usage is more among younger and educated individuals who have a source of income. This is similar to Hafkin and Huyer's (2007) report which states that even in the developed countries, non-users of Internet are disproportionately females, older, less educated and poor and similar patterns have been observed in developing nations. Alabi's (2013) study also found that young and educated people are the highest users of the Internet. By implication, age, levels of economic status and education are factors that either include or exclude individuals from having access and usage of the Internet.

It was found that majority of the female respondents (91%) (see table 3) accessed the internet to get information on issues like health, nutrition, fashion, recipes and economic empowerment. The use of social networking is more among females (81%) than males (25%). More males (37%) use the internet for professional purposes than women (23%). More men (22%) use the internet for academic and research purposes than women (11%). Alabi's (2013) study found that male students used the internet to download resources, create website and participate in discussion groups. Gillwald, Milek and Stork (2010) also explain that women accessed information on farming, economic activities, health, nutrition and empowerment. Similarly, Hafkin and Huyer (2007); Ya'u and Aliyu (2017) found that women accessed the internet for personal and social use, while men accessed the internet more for professional or work-related reasons. A critical look at the reasons for Internet usage among the respondents indicates that it is an extension of gender roles and expectations; hence pattern of usage differs between males and females.

The study identified the factors that affect access and usage of the internet among the respondents. These factors are: cost of access, inadequate skills, inadequate time and the attitude of males. Based on the data of this study, majority of those affected by these factors are female respondents as shown in table 4. In the studies of Gillwald and Mathobi (2017). Anunobi and Mbagwu (2009), Gillwald, Milek and Stork (2010), Collado (2014) and Ya'u and Aliyu (2017), similar factors were found as impeding access and usage of the internet among women. In addition, table 4 indicates that less male respondents were impeded by cost, inadequate skills, inadequate time and male attitude in access and usage of the Internet.

Nigeria is a patriarchal society where men dominate and control women in almost all aspects of their lives. This phenomenon is extended to access and use of the internet among women. As shown in table 4 of the study, the attitude of males (patriarchy) is also a factor that impedes access and usage of internet among women. Forty seven percent of females and 28% of males agreed to that effect. In Ya'u and Aliyu's (2017) study, 65% of husbands do not allow their wives to access the internet and 60.7% of fathers expressed concern about their daughters using the internet. Further, the study found that some marriages had collapsed as a result of the use of the Internet. In the words of Hafkin and Huyer (2007) men in Africa feel that women should not be allowed to access the internet unsupervised because it could negatively affect relationships. In Northern Nigeria, many men see the Internet as a platform where women can be exposed to values, norms and practices that are considered negative.

Hence, to a large extent, men (husbands and fathers) can prevent their wives, daughters and sisters from accessing and using the Internet.

It is worthy to note that those who cannot read and write (illiterates) cannot access and use the internet. In Nigeria, illiteracy is higher among women than men especially in the northern part of the country. According to a British Council Report on Nigeria (2012) in eight Northern states, over 80% of women cannot read compared with 54% for men. And that more than two thirds of 15-19-year-old girls in northern Nigeria are unable to read a sentence compared to less than 10% in the South. By implication, these females who cannot read and write are excluded in access and usage of the internet. Therefore, the internet remains largely the tool of the more educated and more affluent, Briggs (2010).

Gender disparity in access and usage of the internet has great implications for development in Nigeria. Livingston (2010) argued that digital exclusion not only means missing out on the possible advantages of being online: economic, political and social conditions are altered offline by the very existence of the online, and this gives the online a new significance. Nigerian women face numerous challenges like poverty, inadequate participation in government, inequality and discrimination, domestic violence, maternal mortality and other health challenges, child related diseases. Pate (1994) vividly explains the position of Nigerian women as low with regards to their equality, nutrition, health, marriage, education and employment. He further states that women are considered subordinates and illiteracy is higher among them, likewise maternal mortality. Information on these challenges and other development issues are available on the internet unfortunately the women who cannot access and use the Internet miss out on these lives changing information. In addition, Burton (2010) asserts that those who cannot access the Internet are actually disenfranchised from the information revolution.

In Nigeria, the women that cannot access and use the internet cannot participate in meaningful development of the society because they do not have the necessary information. Their inability to participate in meaningful societal development further widens the already existing gender inequality and this does not augur well for women and the society in general. The fact that more men access and use the Internet than women implies that men are ahead in self- development, it also means that men can contribute more to societal development than women. Nigerian women constitute about half of the population and their participation in development process is very important, hence the need for women to access and use the Internet to get development-oriented information in addition, women's inability to fully participate in development slows down societal development. In the words of Paul (2015), inadequate access and use of the Internet affects the empowerment of women and make them lag behind socially.

Having access to the Internet has implication for development in Nigeria. The Internet empowers individuals with information on development issues like health, online learning, education, politics, governance, culture, economic opportunities, markets for products, networking, improved nutrition, improved standard of living etc. There is no doubt that if both genders were able to access and get the required information on the Internet, it will lead to individual development and consequently societal development.

Conclusion

The study revealed that more men access and use the Internet than women. Factors responsible for this phenomenon include cost, inadequate skills, inadequate time, especially because of domestic duties, and attitude of men. There is also disparity in pattern of usage as men use the Internet more for professional and work-related issues while women use the Internet more for social networking. Gender disparity in Internet access and usage has implications on development in Nigeria as many women miss out on the benefits and opportunities afforded by the Internet. In addition, without accessing and using information that is available on the Internet, individuals cannot fully develop and also contribute to societal development. This calls for appropriate policies to address the obstacles to access and usage of the Internet among women in Nigeria.

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